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SUBJECT: MAY 14 TAO PRESS BRIEFING: SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE,
INAUGURATION, WEEKEND CHARTERS, MAINLAND TOURISM

Summary

¶1. The May 14 Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) press briefing was dominated by discussion of the May 12 earthquake in Sichuan:

-- The spokesman addressed the fate of 2,897 Taiwan compatriots who were traveling in Sichuan at the time of the quake, stating that 588 were stranded in Jiuzhaigou, 13 were trapped on a suspended cableway in Dujiangyan, and that one three-year-old boy had been killed.

-- The spokesman expressed appreciation for the messages of condolence from (Taiwan President-elect) Ma Ying-jeou and others in Taiwan and listed significant donations of funds and goods from Taiwan organizations and individuals to the relief efforts. He noted that Taiwan's two major civilian religious foundations, the Tzu Chi Foundation and Dharma Drum Mountain, had delivered 110 tons of food, medicine, blankets and other supplies to the affected region.

-- The spokesman said that because of blocked roads and destroyed communications, it is difficult to allow relief workers from Taiwan into the disaster area. Taiwan-based groups would be contacted once conditions are suitable.

-- Turning to Ma Ying-jeou's May 20 inauguration, the spokesman said that improving ties is the hope of both sides of the Strait and that joint efforts should be made to open a new phase of cross-Strait peace and development.

-- Asked for an update on weekend charter flights and Mainland tourism to Taiwan, the spokesman merely said that the timing of implementation would depend on joint efforts by both sides. End Summary

Taiwan Compatriots in the Earthquake Area

¶2. At the May 14 regular Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) press briefing, TAO spokesman Yang Yi said that more than 100 travel groups from Taiwan, consisting of 2,897 individuals, were in Sichuan when the earthquake struck. Of those, 588 are stranded in the Jiuzhaigou tourist area because of blocked roads and 13 are trapped on the Lingyunyan Cableway in Dujiangyan. One three-year old boy from Taiwan was killed in the quake and two persons suffered minor injuries. The TAO is trying to verify the condition of a four-year-old girl. Twenty-eight Taiwan compatriots who were trapped in the Friendship Tunnel between Dujiangyan and Wenchuan were rescued and safely made it to Chengdu. Asked about reports of an additional 80 Taiwan persons missing, Yang admitted that these were preliminary figures and that as soon as additional information is available it will be provided to the media. He said that every effort was being made to rescue the stranded people. Yang did not know if contact had been made with the travelers in Jiuzhaigou but said he would provide the information as soon as possible. He provided a hotline number for concerned people to call for updates on the circumstances of Taiwan people caught in the quake.

Taiwan Concern, Assistance to the Quake Victims

13. Yang noted that the KMT Central Committee, Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), (President-elect) Ma Ying-jeou, Honorary KMT Chairman Lien Chan, People First Party Chairman James Soong and New Party Chairman Yu Mu-ming all had sent letters expressing concern and condolences regarding the earthquake. The SEF provided USD 300,000 and offered to send professional search and rescue teams. The spokesman also noted that Taiwan's two major civilian religious foundations, the Tzu Chi Foundation and Dharma Drum Mountain, had chartered cargo flights and delivered 110 tons of food, medicine, blankets and other supplies to the affected region. (Note: The Taiwan media has commented that China's acceptance of this aid resulted from a personal appeal from Lien Chan to Hu Jintao, and that this is the first time the religious organizations have been allowed to provide disaster relief on the Mainland.)

14. Yang said private and corporate donations of cash and goods from Taiwan totaled nearly USD 37 million and that the Taiwan Industry Association has collected from its members nearly USD 1 million for disaster relief. For those Taiwan compatriots wishing to donate, the spokesman urged them to channel their donations through the Taiwan Red Cross to the Red Cross of China or directly to the China Charity Federation. Yang expressed heartfelt thanks for all the assistance rendered and said it demonstrated the Chinese virtue of helping the distressed and assisting those in peril. This outpouring of "love and brotherhood" from Taiwan will help those affected by the earthquake return to productive lives and rebuild their homes.

15. The spokesman acknowledged the many offers from Taiwan of disaster relief teams and specialized search and rescue units to travel to the disaster areas. He said that because of the

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seriousness of the disaster, many roads are blocked and communication disrupted. Therefore, it is difficult to access the area and difficult to allow Taiwan rescue workers to get to the areas to assist with rescue operations. As soon as circumstances permit, Taiwan-based groups would be contacted, he said.

Ma's Inauguration, Charter Flights, Mainland Tourists

16. Asked about expectations for (President-elect) Ma Ying-jeou's leadership on cross-Straits issues in light of his impending inauguration on May 20, the TAO spokesman said the Mainland has noticed that since Ma's election on March 22, Ma has many times expressed his desire to put into practice the commitments he made during the campaign regarding cross-Straits relations. The peaceful development of cross-Straits relations is the common hope and interest of both sides. As Taiwan undergoes a positive change to a new circumstance, China hopes that both sides will make efforts to build mutual trust, set aside disputes, reserve differences and seek common ground, and together create win-win solutions to open a new phase of cross-Straits peace and development. (Note: This formulation refers to President Hu Jintao's 16-character phrase that purportedly encapsulates his goals for cross-Straits relations.). Asked about progress on weekend charter flights and Mainland tourism to Taiwan, Yang said implementing those measures is the expectation of compatriots on both sides of the Strait. China has made active efforts in this regard and the timing of implementation will depend on joint efforts by both sides.

Other Issues

17. In response to a question, the spokesman noted that Tuantuan and Yuanyuan, pandas at the Wolong Panda Reserve in Sichuan that have been designated for Taiwan, are safe. China has approved two Taiwan shipping companies to participate in recently re-opened export of sand to Taiwan. China hopes for fruitful results in joint development of energy resources, including oil and gas exploration, in the Taiwan Strait.

RANDT